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ABSTRACT

Contained in this paper are the 6 steps that the U.S. Office of Education (OE) has taken, or will be taking, to achieve the impact called for by OE's 1971 Indian Education Task Force. First, OE has amended its policy to include a special focus on American Indian education within the agency. Second, OE is developing certain management procedures to increase the impact of its efforts. Third, the Commissioner of Education has asked the Deputy Commissioner for School Systems to set up a special monitoring plan and schedule for reviews of Title I projects (both Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA] and non-BIA) serving Indian children. Fourth, OE is studying several alternatives to obtain the best possible guidance from Indian educators and representatives. Fifth, OE is now taking preliminary steps in the development of a policy on the issue of local control in off-reservation settings. Sixth, OE will work with urban school districts and the existing urban Indian centers to provide technical assistance and improved educational services for urban Indian children. (LS)

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S.P. MARLAND, JR.
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AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

Citing a "heritage of centuries of injustice" President Nixon in a 1970 message to Congress looked at the serious condition of the Indian people on virtually every scale -- "employment, income, education, health."

The President also noted that even Federal programs which are intended to meet the needs of the 827,000 American Indians, members of some 500 tribes, are sometimes ineffective: "It is long past the time that the Indian policies of the Federal Government began to recognize and build upon the capabilities of the Indian people."

Recognizing the overall Federal responsibility affirmed by the President, the Office of Education realized that it, along with other Federal agencies, must look closely at its share of the responsibility.

In April 1971 the U.S. Commissioner of Education, Dr. S. P. Marland, Jr., formed an Indian Education Task Force to review the efforts of the Office of Education (OE) in Indian education and to suggest ways to improve them. The Task Force reported to the Commissioner in early December, and the OE is now putting its recommendations into action.

THE ROLE OF OE

There are several reasons for the Office of Education's intensified interest in Indian education. First is the number of Indian children in public schools. There are nearly 270,000 school-age Indian children. About 197,000 or 73.5 percent are enrolled in regular public schools. Schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) of the Department of the Interior enroll approximately 52,591 or 19.6 percent. Private schools run by religious groups or the tribes account for the remaining 18,323 or 6.9 percent.

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Second, while BIA supplies the largest share of the approximately $300 million total Federal funding for Indian education, OE's contribution continues to rise. In Fiscal Year 1971 support by BIA amounted to roughly $184 million. OE support amounted to more than $73 million.

Other support: by the Office of Economic Opportunity, $26 million; by the Department of Labor, $6 million; and by the Office of Child Development in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, nearly $9 million.

In Fiscal Year 1972, OE's funding of Indian projects and programs will exceed $76 million. More than $50 million will be under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) which supports education of children from low income families, and various discretionary programs (in which OE has some voice in the selection of projects). About $12 million of the Title I amount is money set aside for BIA use in its schools. An additional $26 million of the total is allotted by Public Law 81-874 to local districts enrolling Indian children whose parents live or work on Federal land.

An index to the severe educational problems facing Indian people is their dropout rate as reported by a two-year OE-sponsored National Study of American Indian Education, directed by Dr. Robert J. Havighurst of the University of Chicago and completed in December 1970.

The Havighurst study cited research of two regional educational laboratories that showed, in the northwest and southwest regions of the United States, Indian dropout rates of 43 percent in grades 8-12 against a 32 percent rate for all children in the United States in those grades. In grades 9-12, the Indian dropout rate was 35 compared with 23 percent.

Havighurst found that Indian children, more than children of any other American minority group, believe themselves below average in intelligence and have the poorest self concept of all minority groups tested. He found, too, a widespread and deep feeling among the Indians that much is needed to make schools places that understand and value "who Indians are."

OE INDIAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The OE first entered Indian education on a major scale in 1953, when Public Law 81-815, authorizing school construction assistance to "federally impacted" areas, was amended to include public school districts enrolling Indians living on Federal land.

In 1958 Public Law 81-874, providing general operating resources to federally impacted districts was amended to allow public school districts enrolling Indian reservation children to receive funds from both the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934 (authorizing the Department of the Interior to contract with States for assistance to Indians) and Public Law 81-874. In 1967 Title I, ESEA was amended to include BIA schools.

While most of the OE financial outlay for Indian education is through Title I and the public laws providing for education of children in impacted areas, nearly $22 million in Fiscal year 1972 will go into such programs as teacher training, bilingual education, career education, education for the handicapped, student financial aid, library services, and manpower development.

Some examples:

--The Alaska Statewide Higher Education Services (ASHES) was set up to more effectively meet Indian needs through the Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Special Services to Disadvantaged Students programs. Before ASHES was started last July, these programs were reaching only about 50 students in summer projects. Working with the Alaska Federation of Natives and Alaska Methodist University, Sheldon Jackson College, and the University of Alaska, OE helped set up a statewide system of services for students in or headed for higher education. This school year, the Upward Bound program alone is serving 200 students.

--In Montana, at the Rocky Boy Reservation, kindergarten and 1st grade children are getting a bilingual education under an Indian-controlled school board with support from Title VII ESEA, which provides for this kind of education. An alphabet book for the Cree language has been designed by a 6th grader. Language charts and teacher's manuals are available, and OE's Career Opportunities Program is training Cree teachers at Northern Montana College. Parents are encouraged to work with a word list to reinforce certain words at home.

--In Arizona, another culture-oriented approach is an OE adult basic education demonstration project among the Navajos. The project, now in its third year, has 15 sites spread around the reservation areas. Instructional materials relate to activities familiar to the Navajos such as weaving, tending sheep, and using hand tools. For example, arithmetic is based on the tribal system of counting and measurement.

SIX MAJOR STEPS

While these and many activities like them have been supported by OE for some time, it is clear that further efforts are necessary to help improve the impact of OE's efforts. The Office really had no conscious policy toward Indian education or any strategy to meet Indian education needs until the Commissioner appointed his Indian Education Task Force, composed of seven staff members from several Federal Agencies.

The Task Force found that "OE can take valuable steps in Indian education by purposefully utilizing existing program structures." While OE is already allocating significant resources to Indian education, it said, greater coordination and focus is needed in OE programs if those resources are to achieve a maximum impact on Indian education.

The OE has taken, or is taking, six major steps to achieve the impact called for by the Task Force.

First, OE has amended its policy to include a special focus on Indian education within the agency. This special focus will be OE's attempt to partake of the unique Federal responsibility outlined by the President. The policy amendment is subtle, but significant, since heretofore most agencies have left the entire locus of responsibility to BIA.

While the new policy calls for special OE attention to Indian needs, the action taken will be consistent with OE's overall responsibility to disadvantaged students and a recognition of the fact that until now BIA has held the major responsibility.

Second, OE is developing certain management procedures to increase the impact of its efforts. The Commissioner has identified the improvement of OE efforts in Indian education as a priority within the operational planning system and has directed new and tighter planning procedures be established to improve joing efforts with BIA and to coordinate OE's own policies toward Indians, with a special emphasis on discretionary programs. This includes a division of management responsibilities to insure coordination of efforts.

Up to now OE's efforts have been scattered throughout many programs administered by different divisions with little coordination. And even though coordination with BIA improved to the point where there are memorandums of agreement concerning Title I, bilingual programs, and graduate education, more direct cooperation is needed.

The OE's Office of American Indian Affairs has served as an advocate, as a liaison between OE and the Indian community, and as a provider of technical assistance to programs, but specific coordination mechanisms are needed to develop policy, effect better cross-bureau cooperation, and monitor programs.

Third, the Commissioner has asked the Deputy Commissioner for School Systems to set up a special monitoring plan and schedule for reviews of Title I projects (both BIA and non-BIA) serving Indian children and to be on the lookout for any improper uses of Public Law 874 funds.

Fourth, the OE is studying several alternatives to obtain the best possible guidance from Indian educators and representatives. The President's message discussed the right of Indians to have a greater voice in shaping the education of their children. This is a complicated issue, particularly since Indian people live in different settings and jurisdictions.

Fifth, the OE is now taking preliminary steps in the development of a policy on the issue of local control in off-reservation settings.

THE URBAN INDIAN

The sixth move bears on the serious education problems of the urban Indian. An estimated 38 percent of American Indians, about 304,000 live in metropolitan areas now, compared with 27 percent in 1960. (The rest are about evenly divided between reservations and non-reservation rural areas.) Although it is known that urban Indians do have significant educational problems, as shown partly by truancy and dropout rates, extensive data on these problems are not available.

Commissioner Marland has called for a research focus on the educational needs of urban Indians. In addition, the OE will work with urban school districts and the existing urban Indian centers to provide technical assistance and improved educational services for urban Indian children.

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